

PRESS RELEASE

LLUÍS LLEÓ. *Pittore*



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Lluís Lleó. *Pittore*, 2020-22. Mixed media on linen, 185 x 156 cm. Photo: courtesy of the artist

21 April – 24 September, 2023

Ground floor exhibition rooms

Curated by: Rosa Gutiérrez Herranz and Miguel Fernández-Cid

Produced by: MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo

INTRODUCTION

Lluís Lleó inherited his fascination for the Romanesque paintings of the Vall de Boí from his grandfather and father. This interest in traditional techniques comes through in his work, for which he uses the fresco technique by applying pigment in its pure state. His most recent works are characterised by the union between sculpture and painting, halfway between figurative and abstract. Lleó can perfectly combine paint and raised relief work, conferring an almost-architectonic nuance to the ensemble. This sort of pictorial-spatial organicism, in which the material sprouts from the canvas, conveys dichotomies such as lyricism-forcefulness, presence-transparency and order-chaos.



Lluís Lleó. *Pittore*. General view (Room/Patio 1) Photo: courtesy MARCO / UM Fotografia

This exhibition —the first one to be held in a Spanish museum since the artist's return from New York, where he lived for several decades— shows his works from recent years, plus half a dozen of previous works that are considered fundamental. The selection includes pictures and drawings in different mediums; large, naked papers floating in the courtyards; and circular sculptures and structures which partake in a dialogue with the ground floor and the panoptic spaces.

CURATOR'S TEXT

Pittore is the title of this exhibition at the MARCO in Vigo which displays, for the first time at a Spanish museum, a comprehensive panorama of recent work by the artist **Lluís Lleó** (Barcelona, 1961), produced since his return from the United States in 2017. This labour, undertaken at a distance after coming back to his homeland, provides a retrospective and introspective view of his experience of living in America for almost thirty years.

With this inscription, borrowed from a painting by Philip Guston, Lleó pays homage to some of the artists who have inspired him –Eva Hesse, Jannis Kounellis, Ellsworth Kelly: *Hesse* (2021-22 and 2023), *Jannis en Lalibela* (2023), *Durrell@Co.*, *El viaje imposible*, *Todo lo que viste es tuyo* (2022)– and to painting itself, which is arranged throughout the exhibition in the most varied techniques and media, including the disciplines of sculpture and installation. However, *Pittore* is, most importantly, a painter's declaration made by an artist –with an architect's vocation– –*Yo quería ser arquitecto* [I wanted to be an architect](2023)–, whose work goes beyond the edges of the canvas and the wall –*Nosotras* (2020-22), *Guetaria 1895* (2022-23)– opens multiple “windows” from within a painting –*Gould* (2019), *Acuérdate de mirar* (2022), *Paisaje líquido I and II* (2022)– and builds spaces where one can live inside a painting –*Aquí vive un pintor* [A painter lives here](2022).

The heart of the exhibition is the panopticon where Lleó has installed *The Perfect Year*, a circular steel structure clad in al fresco decorated terracotta, a piece he began in 2008 after the death of his father who was also a painter.

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Lluís Lleó. *The Perfect Year*, 2008-. Fresco on terracotta on stainless steel, 32 x 35 x 20 cm each
Photo: courtesy MARCO / UM Fotografía

The Perfect Year is a painter's private diary of sorts: this work in progress consists of 365 blocks in which Lleó has jotted down landscapes, dates, appearances and, especially, disappearances. A space-time circle which serves to round off, in a way, the journey of an entire lifetime.

Lleó's universe expands outwards from this central point, through MARCO's galleries and courtyards, through the paintings on linen or paper and the wooden and stone sculptures covered in fresco, oils, acrylics, watercolours, ink and graphite, pieces that communicate with each other and transform the experience of the space into an installation-cum-artistic intervention. A whole array of techniques displays the mastery of a painter inseparable from his craft starting out with sketching, an idea jotted down in a notebook, which is later fleshed out on a variety of media.

Hence, the suite of works on Nepal or Buhtan paper from 2015-16 –*Cypris, Vitrea, Hecuba, Nestira...*– that bear the title of the names of the forty-eight varieties of the Morpho butterfly. A collection that evokes a lepidopteran airiness heightened by the fragility of the media: drawings executed on a butterfly's wing. Not to mention the set of sculptures called *Oz* (2022), stone blocks in the shape of an upside-down "L" (LLuís LLeó?) from which hang pieces of paper that have been drawn on in wax crayons and pencil and which recall the decals used to transfer the drawing to fresco and are arranged in the manner of wayside marker stones. A suite that recalls the idea, at great cost to the painter, of habitable paintings which provide momentary "refuge" for the onlooker while exploring an oeuvre, Lleó's, that is invariably "a journey of sorts".



Lluís Lleó. *Pittore*. General view (Room/Patio 2). Photo: courtesy MARCO / UM Fotografía

Lluís Lleó's work mixes intimacy and overt appeals to the onlooker, firmness and insubstantiality, the expressivity of techniques and materials and a paring down of forms, a melting away of the frontiers between abstraction and figuration, the geometric and the organic, since his motives, even his least referential ones, always return to emotions, memories, landscapes or lived-in dwelling places.

Rosa Gutiérrez Herranz and Miguel Fernández-Cid, exhibition curators

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Barcelona in 1961 and resident in New York from 1989 to 2017, **Lluís Lleó** currently lives and works dividing his time between Ampurdán and the airport, where he is ever ready to catch a plane to Mexico, Paris or Rome. Lleó is a stateless artist, because the only country he recognizes as his home is painting, both “classical” and at the same time contemporary. His oeuvre is rooted, on the one hand, in Vall de Boí’s vernacular, Romanesque and Mediterranean tradition and of the Italian, Trecento and Quattrocento, fresco painters who worked there, and from whom he learnt in a self-taught manner, being handed down to him via a family lineage of painter-craftsmen and fresco decorators. It is a legacy from which he also inherited an adeptness for drawing, a taste for the craft and an architectonic conception of painting. On the other hand, his international career in the United States opened his work up to an encounter with American modernity, from abstract expressionism to postminimalism. This apprenticeship and life journey has conferred him an individual voice, running against the current to fashions and trends, and they have turned him into one of the most singular artists of the current art scene.

His professional career was launched in the 80s, when he had his first one man show at the Arteunido Gallery in Barcelona (1988), having previously won a drawing competition at a very young age and taken part in a number of group exhibitions. In a decade dominated by gestural hyperbole and excess, Lleó produced a silent work, of restrained lyricism, which was expressed by means of architectonic motifs on metal plates charged with symbolic echoes which had appeared after an engraving apprenticeship. He settled in New York in 1989, but continued exhibiting regularly in numerous art venues in Barcelona (Alejandro Sales, Carles Taché), Madrid (Antonio Machón, Carmen Gamarra) and Palma de Mallorca (Altair, Pelaires), as well as maintaining an international presence at galleries in New York (The Elkton Gallery), Miami (MV Art), Hong Kong (Mindy Oh Gallery), Brussels (Velge & Noirhomme Gallery, Maison Particulière), Berlin (Mc Laughlin Gallery) and Mexico City (Galería Estéreo), and at art fairs such as Art Chicago, Art Cologne, FIAC and ARCO. His work has also been shown in numerous international and national group shows and in solo exhibitions at institutions such as Caixaforum (Girona, 2006), Centre d’Art Tecla Sala (Hospitalet de Llobregat, 2018) and the Instituto Cervantes (Paris, 2017).

While in the United States he came into contact with the transcendent essentialism as represented by Rothko and Agnes Martin, the reductionism of Albers, the hard-edge and shaped canvases of Ellsworth Kelly, crayon works by Jasper Johns and a sensitive approach to materials by sculptors like Christopher Wilmarth, Eva Hesse, Martin Puryear and Isamu Noguchi. Lleó’s work opened up to the possibility of large formats and a process of purification was set in motion, but without renouncing the expressiveness and experiences of his European traditions, at the same time adding new techniques, such as crayons or fresco, and new media, namely stone, wood and steel, while also recovering the discipline of drawing on Buhtan and Nepal paper. In parallel, his work expanded in the space: it detached from the walls, grew in size and worked its way into circular structures, walls and pedestals. In 2002 he began to collaborate with architects such as I. M. Pei (World Trade Center, Barcelona) and Rafael Moneo (South Souks, Beirut, 2010) and in 2014 he tackled public sculpture (*Stones*, Canapost, Girona) which he eventually took to Park Avenue in New York (*Morpho’s Nest in a Cadmium House*, 2017), a place where artists such as Dubuffet, Léger, Indiana, Haring and Christo had been displayed.

Works by Lluís Lleó are part of many museums and collections such as, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Banco de España Collection, Madrid; BBVA Collection, Madrid; Rafael Tous e Isabel de Pedro Collection, Barcelona; Banc de Sabadell Collection; Museu d’Art Contemporani Es Baluard, Palma de Mallorca; Col· Testimoni Collection, “la Caixa” Foundation; Suñol Foundation, Barcelona; Collection of the Coca-Cola Foundation, Madrid; Francisco Godia Collection, Barcelona; OlorVisual Collection of the Ernesto Ventós Foundation, Barcelona; Mango Collection, Barcelona; Hotusa, Barcelona; Laboratorios Salvat Collection, Barcelona; The Morgan Library, New York; Princeton University Art Museum, New Jersey; World Bank, Washington, DC.; The Andreas H. Bechler Foundation, Charlotte, NC.; Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, NC; Fidelity Investments Corporate Art Collection; Bank of America Collection; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Sofía Imber, Caracas; Nagoya Art Museum, Japan; Collection Tore A. Holm, Oslo; Otten Kunstraum, Hohenems, Austria; Näder Collection, Berlin; Collection Bank for International Settlements, Basle; Maison Particulière, Brussels; Pérez Museum of Art, Miami.

GENERAL INFORMATION / DOCUMENTATION / ACTIVITIES

Opening Hours

From Tuesdays to Saturdays (including holidays), from 11am to 2.30pm and from 5pm to 9pm. Sundays, from 11am to 2.30pm

Documentation

The Library-Documentation Center at MARCO has prepared a **documentary dossier** which brings together links to articles and other information about the artist, which is available on the website www.marcovigo.com at [Library/News](#) and [Exhibitions/Present](#).

Exhibition catalogue

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue published by the MARCO, illustrating the works exhibited together with texts by both the artist and the exhibition curators.

School programmes

With the collaboration of Fundación “la Caixa”

Until 16th June 2023

Times: Tuesdays to Fridays 10.00 to 13.00

By reservation only: tel. 986 113900 Ext. 100 / 986 113908 / Email: comunicacion@marcovigo.com

Children’s workshops

With the collaboration of Fundación “la Caixa”

Until 27st May 2023

Times: Saturdays at 11.00 to 12.30 (3 to 6 year-olds) and at 12.30 to 14.00 (7 to 12 year-olds)

By reservation only: tel. 986 113900 Ext. 100 / Email: recepcion.marco@gmail.com

Information and Guided Visits

Gallery staff are happy to respond to questions and queries related to the exhibition. Additionally guided tours are available: Daily at 18.00 / ‘A la carta’ visits for groups are available by appointment.

Interactive Maps via the Vigo app

The interactive maps system accessible on the Vigo app allows visitors to consult exhibition-related content (videos, pictures, information about the pieces on show), either via beacons or bluetooth devices located inside the museum spaces or anywhere else via the map on your mobile phone’s screen after downloading the app, or on the Concello de Vigo website.

Contact Communication and Press Office

Marta Viana Tomé

Tel. +34 986 113908 /113904/ 113900

comunicacion@marcovigo.com